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Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 274019

FOLLOWING REPEAT MOSCOW 16499 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BANGKOK CHIANG MAI HONG KONG PEKING RANGOON UDORN VIENTIANE 17 NOVEMBER 75.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 16499

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, CH, UR, LA, XC
SUBJECT: THE SOVIETS IN LAOS

REF: A. STATE 265095; B. VIENTIANE 6244

1. MOSCOW'S OFFICIAL LINE ON LAOS IS THAT IT FAVORS PEACE AND STABILITY IN THE REGION, THAT IT SUPPORTS THE "COALITION" GOVERNMENT, AND THAT IT PROVIDES AID UNDER BILATERAL AGREEMENTS. THE QUESTION OF SOVIET MOTIVES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR INCREASED PRESENCE (PARA 1) IS MORE COMPLEX. THE MOST EVIDENT (AS REF B STATES SUCCINCTLY) INVOLVE SUPPORTING A NEWLY "LIBERATED" COUNTRY, COUNTERING AND COMPETING WITH THE CHINESE, AND SIMPLY EXPANDING THEIR OWN PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE WHEREVER THEY CAN.

2. COMPETING WITH THE CHINESE IS THE PRIMARY MOTIVATION FOR SOVIET POLICY IN ASIA. MOSCOW HAS SOUGHT, WITH CONSIDERABLE
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SUCCESS, TO BUILD UP ITS TIES WITH THE COUNTRIES WHICH BORDER

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CHINA, FROM ITS SATELLITE MONGOLIA TO NORTH VIETNAM TO ITS MAIN NON-COMMUNIST ALLY, INDIA. IN THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS, THE SOVIETS WOULD PROBABLY LIKE A RING OF ALLIES OR NEAR-ALLIES (COMMUNIST OR NOT) TO HELP "CONTAIN" CHINA. SECOND BEST WOULD BE COUNTRIES WHICH WELCOME THE SOVIETS ON AN EQUAL BASIS WITH THE CHINESE. LAOS WOULD FIT INTO THE LATTER CATEGORY, AND MOSCOW'S EFFORT IS AIMED AT STRENGTHENING ITS RELATIVE STANDING FOLLOWING THE DECLINE IN U.S. INFLUENCE AND PRESENCE THERE.

3. MOSCOW'S EFFORT, AS WE SEE IT, FITS IN TWNDEM WITH HANOI'S, AND THE SOVIETY PREFER THE DRV AS THE DOMINANT REGIONAL POWER EVEN IF THIS MEANS VIRTUAL DRV HEGEMONY IN LAOS. A STRONG HANOI, IN MOSCOW'S PERCEPTION, IS THE BEST BULWARK AGAINST INCREASED CHINESE INFLUENCE IN INDOCHINA AND (TO A LESSER EXTENT) IN OTHER PARTS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE SOVIETS HAVE SAID PRIVATELY THAT THEY CONSIDER LAOS AND THAILAND TARGETS FOR INCREASED PRC "SUBVERSION"--A LINE WHICH NATURALLY JUSTIFIES INCREASED SOVIET EFFORTS. IN SUM, WE THINK LAOS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BECOME AN ARENA OF "SHARP COMPETITION" BETWEEN MOSCOW AND PEKING.
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